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North Korea: Ambassadors Called Home Early [redacted]

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The annual return of a large portion of the North Korean diplomatic corps to Pyongyang for consultations is under way. [redacted] North Korean ambassadors or chiefs of mission from over 30 countries and the senior representative at UN headquarters have departed for home. Most of the departures occurred between 9 and 12 November. The North Korean Ambassadors to China and the USSR also have apparently returned. [redacted]

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The recall is not total in scope. For example, the North Korean Ambassador to Romania was present to greet Vice President Pak Song-chol on his 17 November arrival in Bucharest for the Romanian party congress. He and other overseas representatives could return in coming weeks as the envoys now in Pyongyang are sent back to their posts. [redacted]

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The recall this year is taking place earlier than in the past. [redacted]

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[redacted] the meetings were held to review the progress of each embassy during the previous year and the activities for the coming year. [redacted] the meetings were usually held in January and February. This was, in fact, the pattern for the last two years. [redacted]

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It is reasonable to speculate that the assassination of South Korean President Park last month had some impact on the earlier timing of the diplomatic conference this year. It offers the North Korean leadership an opportunity to spell out clearly its policy guidelines for the immediate post-Park era. In this regard, the recall began in earnest about the time that the North Korean party newspaper carried its first authoritative statement on Korean reunification in the wake of the Park assassination. In an editorial on 9 November, North Korea offered to "let bygones be bygones" and urged South Korea to resume a political dialogue. [redacted]

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If past experience is any guide, the marching orders that North Korean diplomats receive will follow closely the lines of this editorial and other follow-up pronouncements such as a 21 November Nodong Sinmun article that once again urged the United States to begin talks with North Korea on replacing the armistice agreement with a peace agreement. The conclave in Pyongyang may well last through the end of the year. The North Korean permanent representative at the United Nations is not expected to return to New York until January 1980. [REDACTED]

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